

Checklist of Guidelines for Psychological Research Papers¹

Writing hypotheses and research questions:

- A simple research hypothesis should name two variables and indicate the type of relationship expected between them.
- When a relationship is expected in a particular population, reference to the population should be made in the hypothesis.
- A simple hypothesis should be as specific as possible, yet expressed in a single sentence.
- If a comparison is to be made, the elements to be compared should be stated.
- Because most hypotheses deal with the behavior of group, plural nouns should usually be used.
- A hypothesis should be free of terms and phrases that do not add to its meaning.
- A hypothesis should indicate what will actually be studied - not the possible implications of a study or value judgments of the author.
- A hypothesis usually should name variables in the order in which they occur or will be measured.
- Avoid using the words “significant” or “significance” in a hypothesis.
- Avoid using the word “prove” in a hypothesis.
- Avoid using two different terms to refer to the same variable in a hypothesis.
- Avoid making precise statistical predictions in a hypothesis.
- A statement of the hypothesis may contain more than one hypothesis. It is permissible to include them in a single sentence as long as the sentence is reasonably concise and its meaning is clear.
- When a number of related hypotheses are to be stated consider presenting them in a numbered or lettered list.
- The hypothesis or hypotheses should be placed before the section on methods.
- It is permissible to use terms other than the term “hypothesis” to refer to a hypothesis.
- In a research report, a hypothesis should flow from the narrative that immediately precedes it.
- Do not state the null hypothesis.

Writing titles:

- If only a small number of variables are studied, the title should name the variables.
- If many variables are studied, only the types of variables should be named.
- A title should indicate what was studied - not the results or conclusions of the study.
- Mention the population(s) in a title when the type(s) of population are important.
- Consider the use of subtitles to amplify the purposes or methods of study.
- A title may be in the form of a question; this form should be used sparingly and with caution.
- In titles, use the words “effect” and “influence” with caution.
- A title should be consistent with the research hypothesis, purpose or question.
- Consider mentioning unique features of a study in its titles.

¹ From Pyrczak, F. & Bruce, R. (2000). Writing Empirical Research Reports.

- Avoid clever titles, especially if they fail to communicate important information about the research

Writing introductions:

- Start the introduction by describing the problem area; gradually shift its focus to specific research hypothesis, purposes or questions.
- The importance of a topic should be explicitly stated in the introduction to a term paper, thesis, or dissertation.
- A statement on the importance of a topic should be specific to the topic investigated.
- Use of the first person is acceptable; it should be used when it facilitates the smooth flow of the introduction.
- The literature review should be presented in the form of an essay- not in the form of an annotated list.
- The literature review should emphasize the findings of previous research-not just the research methodologies and names of variables studied.
- Point out trends and themes in the literature.
- Point out gaps in the literature.
- Point out how your study differs from previous studies.
- Feel free to express opinions about the quality and importance of the research being cited.
- Peripheral research may be cited in a thesis or dissertation when no literature with a direct bearing on the research can be located.
- Use direct quotation sparingly in literature reviews.
- Report sparingly on the details of the literature being cited.
- Consider using literature to provide the historical context for the present study.
- All variables in a research hypothesis, purpose or question should be defined.
- Theories and models on which the research is based should be defined.
- Conceptual definitions should be specific.
- Operational definitions should be provided. These are usually stated in the method section of a report or proposal.
- For each conceptual definition, there should be a corresponding operational definition.
- In the statement of an assumption, consider stating the reason(s) why it was necessary to make the assumption.
- If there is a reason for believing that an assumption is true, state the reason.
- If an assumption is highly questionable, consider casting it as a limitation.
- Consider speculating on the possible effects of a limitation on the results of a study.
- Discuss limitations and delimitations separately.
- If a study is seriously flawed by important limitations, consider labeling it as a pilot study.

Writing methods:

- Describe your informed consent procedures, if any, as well as steps taken to maintain confidentiality.
- The participants should be described in enough detail for the reader to visualize them.

- If there was attrition, state the number who dropped out, the reasons for attrition, if known, and information on the dropouts, if available.
- Unpublished instruments should be described in detail.
- If a published instrument was used, briefly describe the traits that it was designed to measure, its format, and the possible range of score values.
- For both unpublished and published instruments, information on reliability and validity, when available, should be reported.
- Experimental procedures, equipment and other mechanical matters should be described in sufficient detail so that the study can be replicated.
- If a published instrument was used, the variable measured by it may be operationally defined by citing the reference for the instrument.
- If an unpublished instrument was used, the entire instrument should be reproduced in the report or a source for a copy of the instrument should be provided.
- Operational definitions should be sufficiently specific so that another researcher can replicate a study with confidence that he or she is examining the same variables under the same circumstances.

Writing results:

- Organize the analysis and results section around the research hypothesis, purposes or questions stated in the introduction.
- Standard statistical procedures need only be named; you do not need to show formulas or calculations.
- The scores of individual participants usually are not shown; instead, statistics based on them should be reported.
- Present descriptive statistics first.
- Organize large number of statistics in tables and give each table a number and descriptive title.
- The reader should be able to understand the table without reading the text.
- When describing the statistics presented in a table, point out highlights for the reader.
- Statistical symbols should be underlined.
- Use the proper case for each statistic symbol.
- Spell out numbers that are less than ten. Spell out numbers that start sentences.

Writing discussions:

- Consider starting the discussion with a summary.
- In the discussion, refer to the research hypothesis, purposes or questions stated in the introduction.
- Point out the extent to which results of the current study are consistent with the results in the literature reviewed in the introduction.
- Consider interpreting the results and alternative explanations for them in the discussion section.
- Consider mentioning important strengths and limitations in the discussion.
- It is usually inappropriate to introduce new data or new references in the discussion section.

- When possible, explicitly state the implications of the results in the discussion section.
- Be specific when making recommendations for future research.

Writing abstracts:

- In the abstract, refer to the research hypothesis, purposes or questions.
- Highlights of the methodology should be summarized.
- Highlights of the results should be included in the abstract.
- An abstract should usually be short, around 150 to 200 words.

Psychology 441
Qualitative Research Methods
Course Readings

1. Mirchandani, K. (2000). The best of both worlds and cutting my own throat: Contradictory Images of Home-Based Work.
2. Madriz, E. (1997). Images of Criminals and Victims.
3. Charmaz, K. (1994). Identity Dilemmas of Chronically Ill Men.
4. Charmaz, K. (1997). Grounded Theory.
5. Wetherell, M., Stiven, H. & Potter, J. (1997). Unequal egalitarianism: A preliminary study of discourses concerning gender and employment opportunities.
6. Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1997). Discourse Analysis.

Psychology 445
Advanced Research and Design
Course Readings

1. Sternberg, R.J. (1994). How to write an experimental research paper. In **The Psychologists' Companion**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Fein, S. & Spencer, S. (1996). How to read the reading. In **Readings from Social Psychology**. Houghton-Mifflin.
3. **How to read an experiment.**
4. Krull, D.S., Hui-Min Loy, M., Lin, J., Wang, C., Chen, S. & Zhao, X. (1999). The Fundamental Attribution Error: Correspondence Bias in Individualist and Collectivist Cultures. **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin**, **25**, 1208-1219.
5. Aronson, E., Brewer, B. & Carlsmith, E. (1976). **Ethical Issues**.
6. Herman, P.C. **Cookies: A Crucible of Research Ethics**.
7. Smith, H.J. **Draft of Human Subjects Protocol**.
8. **Guidelines for Psychological Research Reports**.
9. Sternberg, R.J. (1994). Guidelines for data presentation. In **The Psychologists' Companion**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. **How to write a psychology research report.**
11. **Selected pages of an article manuscript.**
12. **Grading scheme for final project.**